



## A new plan for school food

UNISON issued guidance in 2009 on changes to the school food service, including new nutritional standards, and how they might impact on staff. There was more change on the horizon when a new school food plan (SFP) was published in 2013 with proposals on a wide range of delivery issues.

This guidance focuses on new food standards in force from January 2015 and universal infant free school meals (UIFSM) from September 2014. Further advice on training, qualifications and professional standards for the school food workforce will be issued as they are developed. The SFP unit produces ongoing guidance on changes to the school food service, which can be

downloaded from their website ([www.schoolfoodplan.com](http://www.schoolfoodplan.com)).

The Children's Food Trust and the Local Authority Caterers' Association have been commissioned to provide a UIFSM implementation support service. This includes telephone (0800 680 0080) and online ([info@childrensfoodtrust.org.uk](mailto:info@childrensfoodtrust.org.uk)) advice services and a direct-support service for schools that currently have low take-up; only provide packed lunches; have in-house catering; are small or very large with capacity issues; or provide to other schools.

Questions that have been raised by UNISON members are answered overleaf.

## Questions and answers on school food changes

### **No one at my school is talking about the changes? Were they well publicised?**

The SFP has been discussed widely within education and in the media. Letters from the schools minister, David Laws, were sent in June 2014 to directors of children's services, headteachers, parents and 'school meals teams'. This letter included personal thanks to staff for their hard work in the introduction of UIFSM and says, "Make sure you are in regular contact with your school leaders". He refers to the UIFSM toolkit ([www.schoolplan.com/toolkit](http://www.schoolplan.com/toolkit)) and the new standards and says that there is a huge opportunity "To put food back at the heart of our schools".

### **Do the new standards mean that school food will be less healthy?**

Some UNISON members told us that the nutritional standards were quite difficult to meet and this view was shared by some providers. The expertise of nutritionists was used to try and simplify the standards, while maintaining a commitment to children's nutritional requirements. Revised standards were trialled in some schools before they were finalised. A poster of the food-based standards and checklists are available at [www.schoolfoodplan.com/standards](http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/standards). There is an explanation on why each food group is important and why some foods must be limited. 'Top tips' are given on how to increase the iron, zinc and calcium content of menus as these are important minerals that are sometimes missing from a child's diet.

### **Do standards apply to food other than lunches?**

There are elements of the standards that apply to the whole school day, including breakfast, mid-morning break and after-school clubs; also to vending machines and tuck shops. These include limits on starchy, pastry and deep-fried portions and meat and poultry products. The only permitted snacks are nuts, seeds, vegetables and fruit with no added salt, sugar or fat. There is still a ban on confectionery, chocolate and chocolate-covered products. Free, fresh drinking water must be available at all times and there is a list of permitted drinks and portion size.

### **Are food allergies and intolerances taken into account?**

Staff will have experience of managing special dietary requirements, but the volume of demand will expand as take-up increases.

SFP guidance says that school leaderships and caterers should work closely with parents to support children with allergies and intolerances. It says that this can feel daunting and suggests working with organisations that can provide practical help on catering for special diets (search "special diet" at <http://whatworkswell.schoolfoodplan.com>).

### **Do meals have to be hot?**

The legal requirement is to provide lunch to infants, in compliance with the food standards. There is an expectation that a hot meal will be routinely offered.

## **Will the standards apply to academies?**

Academies set up between 2008 and 2010 were subject to nutritional standards and there is a requirement for new academies to comply with food standards through their funding agreements. Academies and free schools set up after 2010 will be exempt, but are being asked to comply with the regulations voluntarily.

## **Do academies have to provide universal infant free school meals?**

A legal duty has been placed on all maintained schools in England, including academies and free schools, to offer a free school lunch to children in reception and Year 1 and 2 classes.

## **Do UIFSMs mean that packed lunches are banned for infants?**

The duty is on schools to offer a lunch, not on parents to accept them for their children. The scheme is being introduced to address child health and attainment issues and for lunch to be a community and educational experience, so it is hoped that most families will accept the offer. Parents may believe that they prepare a healthy packed lunch, but research suggests that only 1% meet the standards that apply to school food.

## **Won't small schools struggle?**

A SFP group has been working on the changes faced by schools with less than 150 pupils. They will receive one-off funding from a £22.5 million budget to help with transitional costs.

## **What about schools that have no or inadequate kitchens?**

The government is providing £150 million of capital funding and targeted advice through the UIFSM implementation support group.

## **How will UIFSM affect pupil premium?**

The basis on which pupil premium is calculated will not be affected by the introduction of UIFSM. The number of pupils from families in receipt of qualifying benefits will continue to be collected through the School Census.

## **UNISON's view on the changes to school food**

- UNISON has long supported better school food and has argued for universal free school meals; so the SFP and UIFSM are welcome. But these improvements should not be introduced at the expense of staff.
- The UIFSM toolkit says that, "achieving success will rely on investing in and motivating staff". Every member of the school food workforce is vital to success and they should be fully informed and involved throughout the process of change. Nobody understands how school kitchens need to be organised better than those who work in them.
- Other members of school staff should also be aware of the importance of the policy and their role in its successful implementation. Office staff, for example, will be involved in new approaches to registering children for free school meals.

- The UIFSM toolkit refers to a “rapidly expanding service” and says that schools must, with the caterer or cook, “determine the need for new staff and staff training (including induction training)”. This, it says, is best planned in advance.
- There will be extra demand in the dining room, so the need for additional lunchtime supervisors and their training must also be reviewed.
- As take-up increases so will special dietary requirements. There should be a whole school, whole day approach involving parents, the service manager and catering staff. There may be need for dietetic support and additional training for staff.
- The need to make changes will vary from school to school, but there should be risk assessment in all cases of new equipment, kitchen facilities or ways of working.
- Much of the advice that is available is on the SFP and other websites. All staff should have access to these and the management team should ensure that computers are available, and training and paid time to use them.
- UNISON has issued branch circulars, newsletters, published articles, sent electronic information to over 5,000 school catering members. We ran an SFP/ UIFSM fringe at UNISON’s 2014 conference. Make sure that members are in the loop and encourage non-members to join.
- Queries can be sent to [education@unison.co.uk](mailto:education@unison.co.uk) or 020 7121 5512.

This guidance focuses on new food standards in force from January 2015 and universal infant free school meals (UIFSM) from September 2014.

It provides an overview of the changes, sets out UNISON’s view and answers many of the questions raised by the changes.

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